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NOTES OF A BIRD CATCHER.

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AMONG the few pastimes of those who "go down to the sea in ships" and "do business in [the] great waters" of the southern hemisphere is that of fishing for the sea birds that abound in the vicinity of Cape Horn and the Cape of Good Hope. The birds that will take a hook are limited to a few species of Albatrosses and Petrels, some, like the Whale Bird (*Prion turtur*), which are extremely abundant, keeping at a respectful distance, while others, like the Giant Skua, steadily refuse to take a bait under any circumstances. First and foremost is the Wandering Albatross (*Diomedea exulans*), whose great size and cautious behavior makes his capture the crowning triumph of the avian angler. It is commonly stated that the Albatross takes a bait readily, but although this may have formerly been true, it is now a very misleading statement. The Albatross has undoubtedly learned wisdom by experience, and just as the grizzly bear is said by Mr. Roosevelt to have become more timid since the introduction of improved rifles, so, year by year, the Albatross has grown more and more distrustful of anything with a line attached to it. During four voyages I found that only the younger birds could be caught easily, those of the first year the most readily, those of the second less so, the difficulty increasing regularly with age. Like all other sea birds, Albatrosses can be most easily enticed into biting during tempestous weather when, having been

prevented for days from procuring their regular amount of food, the pangs of hunger overcome their natural distrust.

The Albatross has a deliberate way that accords well with his ample proportions and grave countenance, and when a bait is spied does not hasten to plant himself beside it like a greedy little Cape Pigeon, but usually takes a contemplative turn before settling down for a thorough inspection of the tempting dainty. If the investigation proves satisfactory he may condescend to bite, but it not infrequently happens that by the time this conclusion is arrived at the end of the line is reached also, and the morsel of fat pork is suddenly snatched away leaving the bird looking about him with a much aggrieved and puzzled expression. There the Albatross will often sit for five minutes before rising to follow the departing vessel, possibly to go through with precisely the same performance. Should he, however, be hooked, the spirit of opposition is aroused within him, and sitting upright, with big webbed feet thrust firmly forward, the Albatross beats the water vigorously with his wings, or holds them stiffly extended in an effort to free himself from the hook by mere dead weight.

The strain of such a bird pulling at the end of a hundred and fifty feet of line is considerable; but so long as he pursues these tactics his capture is pretty well assured. For the Albatross is not 'hooked' in the ordinary sense of the word, but is simply held by the hook catching in the curved bill. So long, therefore, as the strain on the line is steady, so long will the hook hold; once slackened, it drops by its own weight, and if, as sometimes happens, the bird flies towards the ship he is soon free.

Like the majority of sea birds, the Albatross cannot rise from a vessel's deck, but waddles about as helpless as if wing-clipped. As regards size, the largest of four measured by me—a two year old bird—was 10' 4" in extent and weighed about fourteen pounds. I have known one to weigh eighteen pounds, and have been told of specimens which actually measured 12, 13, and 15 feet from tip to tip. Is it not possible that it requires as many years for this bird to attain its full size as to put on the adult plumage? Certain it is that the largest specimens are the whitest and most wary. And I would suggest that melanistic examples of *Diomedea exulans* may not be infrequent, for twice on one voyage large, dark colored birds were observed which, from their size,

could have been no other than this species. These were not young of the year but sooty colored, like a vastly exaggerated Giant Fulmar. Unfortunately I did not improve my opportunities to observe the food of the Albatross, but the stomachs of two that were opened contained partially digested fragments of cuttlefish (?) and a small quantity of feathers.

They have been seen to devour the castaway body of a companion that had been caught and skinned, and to tear up and eat a large ling (*Haloporphyrus*). Doubtless anything that can be eaten does not come amiss.

The farthest north I have any personal record of seeing the Wandering Albatross is 30° S., 24° W.

The Molly-Hawk, or Molly-Mawk (*Diomedea melanophrys*), and the Goney (*D. culminata*) are more easily taken than their larger relative, but the Sooty Albatross (*Phaebetria fuliginosa*)—in the ordinary track of vessels at least—is wary in the extreme, and, although it will approach so near that the eye is distinctly visible, steadily refuses to even look at a bait. *Diomedea melanophrys* was seen occasionally in the harbor of Valparaiso.

Most knowing of all Petrels is the Cape Hen, or Giant Fulmar (*Ossifraga gigantea*). If a loose piece of fat pork was thrown out, it was immediately snatched up, but even during heavy gales it was quite impossible for me to coax one to touch a piece with hook and line attached. Where the tempting morsel was large the Cape Hen would indeed swoop towards it as if about to alight, but caution invariably got the better of appetite, and I am ready to take oath that these birds actually winked as they sailed by. In its movements, and especially when alighting, the Giant Fulmar has an uncouth, angular look about it that is very amusing. The species not uncommonly ranges as far north as 12° south latitude, for several were seen and two shot at the Chincha Islands during the month of November. One perfect albino was seen, presenting a strange contrast to the others by which it was accompanied.

Majaqucus aquinoctialis is apparently not common off Cape Horn and of the few seen fewer still could be induced to take a hook. Those that did so invariably escaped by reversing the tactics of the Albatross and flying towards the ship instead of indulging in worse than useless opposition. It being simply

impossible to pull in line as fast as a bird could fly, the hook always dropped from the bird's beak.

The Southern Fulmar (*Fulmarus glacialisoides*) is not uncommon off Cape Horn, and is readily taken. It bites freely, and fights well when captured, scratching, flapping, and biting in a very vigorous manner. The quarrelsome disposition of this bird at times becomes a drawback to his capture, for a Fulmar will frequently devote his time and energies to driving away the Cape Pigeons sooner than to take the bait himself.

Thalassoica antarctica is about as common, or uncommon, as the preceding species, and is also comparatively easy to capture. As a rule both these species keep farther from ships than the abundant and tame Cape Pigeon (*Daption capensis*). Of the species herein noted, *Thalassoica antarctica* appears to be the most exclusively southern in its range. Going southwards *Daption* made its appearance May 16, *Fulmarus* May 20, and *Thalassoica* not until June 21.

The well known Cape Pigeon (*Daption capensis*) is usually met with in the Atlantic near latitude 35° S., or "off the River Plate," as it is termed in the vernacular. On the Pacific coast it seems to range much farther north, for in July we left them outside the harbor of Valparaiso, and in September they were common in latitude 11° south. Captain Carey, of the ship 'Calhoun,' informed me that a few followed that vessel nearly to Acapulco, 16° N.

The Cape Pigeons are always hungry and it is an easy matter to take any desired number of them. Ordinarily they are set free after a short detention, but occasionally they are killed, and after parboiling made into a pot pie. Concerning the flavor thereof I cannot now speak positively, as it has been many years since my last taste of Cape Pigeon pie. This species has an extremely disagreeable habit, shared by many of its relatives, of vomiting up when captured a thick, oily, and ill-smelling liquid, so that it is necessary to handle this bird with some caution.

The Cape Pigeon *can* dive although it very rarely does so, usually gathering its food from the surface of the water. Once or twice I have noticed them dipping up the water as if drinking, but this may not have been the case.

Like the other Petrels, but to a still greater extent, the Cape Pigeons delight in assembling around the contents of the cook's swill pail. If there be nothing but dish-water, sufficient only to

make a smooth, oily spot, down will go every bird near, and there they will sit for five, or even ten minutes gazing at one another and apparently waiting, like Micawber, for something to turn up. My note book says that in February, going east, we saw no Cape Pigeons, the Petrels seen then being probably *Æstrelata*, which, although following in our wake, kept at a considerable distance.

Last and least (in size at all events) is the busy Mother Carey's Chicken, never at rest but perpetually fluttering over the water, ever and anon pattering over the surface yet not even alighting to feed.

Once, and only once, did I observe these little birds take a bait, and that was when a heavy gale of several days' duration had apparently rendered them perfectly ravenous. *

The following method can be vouched for as very successful in capturing the Stormy Petrels. To one end of a spool of stout, black thread fasten a bit of wood just large enough to make a drag that will keep the thread taut when towed behind a vessel. To this attach at intervals of from four to six feet threads with a small hook or bent pin at the end, graduating the length according to the distance they will be from the drag. These will hang from the main thread like droppers from a leader and the little Petrels flying to and fro in the vessel's wake will sooner or later strike some of the threads and become entangled.

A few words in conclusion on the question as to whether or not the birds seen in a ship's wake are the same day after day. It seems to me that Capt. Hutton is correct in his opinion that while they *may* be it is doubtful if they are. In exceptional cases, as, for example, the birds which followed the ship 'Calhoun' nearly to Acapulco, it would appear that the birds were undoubtedly a small flock enticed beyond their usual range. Personally, I can see no objection to the theory that the Albatross and other birds can fly for several days in succession without rest, the more that their easy sailing flight requires the minimum of exertion. Moreover, I have on moonlight nights occasionally observed birds circling around the ship, and on two occasions birds were picked up on deck between 4 and 8 A. M. One of these was a small *Puffinus*, the other an *Oceanodroma*(?). I

* This has been my own experience with these little birds, but Col. Goss tells me that on the Grand Banks they will bite eagerly at a hook baited with a bit of cod liver.

do see serious objections to the theory that sea birds regularly rest upon the water at night, in the long and heavy gales so prevalent off Cape Horn, which would seem to make such a proceeding a physical impossibility. And how is it with the little Stormy Petrels which have apparently a constitutional aversion to sitting in the water?

It is doubtful if the Albatross habitually follows any one vessel for a considerable length of time, while the reverse is probably true of the Cape Pigeon. While the amount of 'pickings' from a single ship would make quite an item in the daily fare of several Cape Pigeons, they would count for little with one Albatross. This latter bird is much given to making vast stretches back and forth over the ocean, and even while near a ship continually circles round about in search of food. That an Albatross *can* see a vessel distinctly from an elevation of a thousand feet is doubtless true, but judging from my own experience this bird rarely ascends to such a height, for I *never* observed it more than two or three hundred feet above the ocean. Is it not more probable that the bird meets with vessels while quartering over the ground as just described and stays by them until drawn off in search of food? Contrary to what might be supposed, it is during calms that birds become detached from the ship they may have been following. At such times the Albatross is especially given to resting upon the water, from which it cannot then rise without much flapping of wings and splashing of water as it runs along the surface until it has acquired the necessary momentum to start upon its customary graceful flight. The smaller birds follow the example of their larger relatives, and, scattered here and there by twos and threes, alternately quarrel and preen their plumage until the breeze springs up, and with it everything once more starts into renewed activity.

A NEW VIREO FROM GRAND CAYMAN, WEST INDIES.

BY CHARLES B. CORY.

THE box of birds lately received from Grand Cayman, or Great Cayman, contained still another new bird from that most interesting island, which I propose to call